

Dragonshards

The Serens, Part One

(Cultures of Eberron)

By Keith Baker



Red Kharizhak faced Delhasha the Cold across the obsidian altar as the screams of dying men echoed across the plain. Kharizhak licked the blood off the tip of his ancestral blade.

"The blood of the White Wanderers is sweet," he hissed. "I shall drink my fill as your tribe dies in fire."

Delhasha's pale eyes glittered behind the mask of white scales. Her voice was cool and calm. "You have been blinded by your flames, Kharizhak. It is the Selhastorh'ak who face final judgment, and yours will be a cold death."

Kharizhak laughed, lowering his blade to Delhasha's chest. "I see no weapon in your hands, dragonspeaker. Will you grow claws and tear me apart?"

"You will fall this night," Delhasha replied. "But it is not my claws you should fear." She opened her hand, revealing a wyrmling's tooth engraved with draconic runes.

Kharizhak cried out in fear and rage but the sound was drowned out by the roar of the white dragon as she dived down from the moonless sky.

Heart and History

A traveler passing through Q'barra or the Lhazaar Principalities is sure to hear tales of the tribes of the Seren Islands. These fierce barbarians guard the coast of Argonnessen, and it is said that the waters of Totem Beach run red from the blood of their victims. In song and story, the Serens are typically cast as horrible monsters -- firebreathing warriors who consume the flesh of their still-living foes and sacrifice children to their draconic gods.

These stories are much exaggerated. The Serens are fierce warriors who will give their lives to defend the shores of Argonnessen from outsiders but they are not cannibals, and their reverence for dragons is more complex than simple awe of the mighty beasts.

Approximately thirty Seren tribes are scattered across the islands and the coastline of Argonnessen. Every tribe has a legend of a draconic covenant: a tale of how their ancestors were brought from a distant land by a mighty dragon and charged to honor the dragon and defend the land from the weak and unworthy. The dragonspeaker priests say that the dragons are the embodiment of all that is best in the human spirit. When a Seren dies, his soul is judged, and if he has upheld the covenant, he is placed in the shell of a dragon's egg. When enough worthy souls are brought together in the egg, it hatches and a new dragon is born, distilled from the essence of all the noble souls that went before.

The Seren islands are harsh and unforgiving, and the tribes exist in continuous conflict. The first recorded

contact with the Serens comes from a Sarlonan account from -3,120. The civilization has changed very little over the millennia; the Serens are devoted to their traditions. Until the dragons themselves order a change, the Serens will continue to uphold the covenants. Any traveler who wishes to explore the land of the dragons will have to deal with these barbarians.

National Character

Each Seren tribe is defined by its draconic covenant. When creating a Seren tribe, a DM needs to answer the following questions:

- What color was the draconic founder? Look to appearance, breath weapon, and elemental ties for things that the Seren tribe will use for inspiration. Traditionally tribes of the same color frequently act as allies despite different alignments and beliefs.
- What alignment was the founder? In Eberron, alignment and draconic color are not automatically linked.
- The Serens are charged to protect Argonessen from the unworthy and to honor the founder. This is a vague directive. What were the specific words of the founder? What does this tribe consider unworthy and how do they honor the founder? Because the Serens consider upholding the covenant to be their key to the afterlife, this is a major point. A violent, chaotic tribe could believe that they honor their founder by spilling the blood of anyone weaker than themselves. A more peaceful tribe could believe that they honor the founder by amassing knowledge or treasures.
- In addition to the general vow to protect Argonessen, some of the tribes have specific, additional charges -- protecting a specific shrine or guarding a particular piece of treasure, for example.

Seren culture is very warlike, and the Serens repel any invaders. Because of this, the people of Khorvaire and Sarlona have learned to avoid Argonessen, leaving the Serens to spend most of their time fighting each other. Through these battles the Serens hone their skills and prove their worth as guardians. Only the strongest have a place on the shores of Argonessen. Children and caregivers are generally spared during raids, allowing tribes to eventually recover from defeat.

Most of the Seren tribes have a similar social structure. The warlord is the mightiest warrior. This position is based purely on skill, and any member of the tribe can challenge a warlord. The warlord oversees all military action: patrolling the land, organizing raids, training young soldiers. A council of dragonspeakers, mystics who use wisdom and magic to guide the tribe, oversees spiritual and domestic matters. Dragonspeaker is a lifelong post with authority within the council based on age. Despite the warlike nature of the Serens, dragonspeakers hold final authority and can overrule a warlord's decisions or even force a warlord to step down from his position.

Gender roles vary by tribe and are often depend on the gender of the founding dragon. In many tribes, female warriors (barbarians) are just as common as men, while in other tribes women become spiritual leaders or are allowed only domestic roles.

Appearance

The Serens claim that the dragons brought them from many lands, and their appearance backs this up. All manner of skin and hair color can be found among the Serens, though there is a tendency toward dark complexions and heavy builds. Tattooing is a common practice on the islands; as Seren warriors win victories in

battle, they earn the right to have draconic features tattooed across their bodies.

Seren culture is primitive. Warriors typically wear hide or leather armor. Some rely on dragonscale tattoos in place of physical armor. Weapons are made from wood, bone, or shell. Each tribe, however, possesses heirloom arms and armor handed down from the draconic founders. These can be both traditional items from the dragons' hoards and dragonscale armor or weapons made from dragon bones or claws.

Away from the battlefield, most Serens wear simple, gray clothing. As Serens rise in influence and reputation, they are allowed to wear clothing and accessories matching the color of the draconic founder. Dragon scale and dragon bone ornaments are reserved for the greatest heroes of the tribe. Such treasures are not passed to descendents upon the owner's death but rather returned to the tribe to be awarded to the next hero who proves worthy.

Language and Names

The Serens speak Draconic as opposed to Common. A Seren may take Common as a bonus language or learn Common by spending a single skill point.

Seren names are also based on the Draconic language. They do not use family names, instead earning titles and honorifics tied to the draconic founder, such as Delhasha'alhasc ("Delhasha the Cold").

Typical Male Names: Durshast, Kharizhak, Lhasharak, Nolashar, Solashan, Xaxhan

Typical Female Names: Aralithyr, Delhasha, Eshka, Freilashka, Hakalasha, Shaesthyr

Character Classes

Serens are raised to be as fierce in battle as the dragons that they revere. The harsh life of the islands lends strength to those who survive it. Most adult Serens have at least one barbarian class level. A few clans with martial traditions mingle barbarian with ranger or monk but these are rare (and respected).

The dragons taught the druidic secrets to humanity, and most dragonspeakers are druids following the traditions of the Gatekeepers or Wardens of the Woods. A few tribes have a bardic tradition, and sorcerers can also be found among the Serens. Sorcerers typically develop powers related to the tribal founder (fire spells for a red sorcerer, for example). While sorcerers are usually considered blessed, a sorcerer who develops spells that seem out of line with the tribal founder -- e.g., fire spells for the tribe of a white dragon -- might be driven from the tribe.

Dracolytes, Dragonsong Lyricists, and Dragon Disciples can also be found among the Serens, and the members of their tribes idolize them. Such individuals, however, are often called to serve dragons themselves and disappear into the center of Argonnessen.

Seren Adventurers

It is unusual for a Seren to leave the islands and shores of Argonessen. When creating a traveling Seren PC or NPC, you should decide why he left his homeland. Consider the following ideas.

- A dragonspeaker -- possibly a member of the Chamber in disguise -- claims that the character must wander the world to fulfill a prophecy and find her destiny.
- The gatekeepers have charged the character to travel to the Land of Demons (Khorvaire) to fight the plans of the Lords of Dust and the Cults of the Dragon Below.
- The character was banished for stealing relics from a sacred shrine. She is innocent but the only way to prove this is to locate the artifacts, wherever they might be!
- A treacherous feud within the tribe resulted in the death of all other members of the character's family. He swore to find powerful allies and return to destroy his enemies and claim leadership of the tribe.

Sample Seren Tribes

Approximately thirty barbarian tribes are spread among the Seren Islands and the coast of Argonnessen. A few representative tribes are described below.

The **Bringers of Fire** were founded by a chaotic evil red dragon. One of the largest and most dangerous tribes, they are one of the only tribes known to completely exterminate Seren clans that they view as unworthy. The Bringers of Fire paint their skin red before battle and make use of flaming oil. They are renowned for their volatile temperaments.

The **White Wanderers** were founded by a true neutral white dragon. They are a nomadic tribe charged to protect a series of shrines. They believe in the power of knowledge and magic, and have a high percentage of literacy and dragonspeakers. Explorers and outsiders looking for Serens to deal with would do well to focus on this tribe. White Wanderers have a cold, chilly demeanor, and never let their emotions show.

The **Stormwalkers** were founded by a lawful evil blue dragon. Although one of the smallest tribes, they are nonetheless dangerous and thus, highly respected. The Stormwalkers developed a martial, monastic tradition emulating the natural attacks of the dragon, and the greatest masters of this art can follow the Initiate of the Draconic Mysteries prestige class presented in the *Draconomicon*.

The **Frostblades** were founded by a lawful good white dragon. While they ruthlessly defend the land from outsiders, they also seek to preserve weaker tribes from the depredations of more violent clans such as the Bringers of Fire. Frostblade dragonspeakers know the secret of alchemist's frost and sometimes use this as a weapon in battle.

The **Totem Guardians** are not a tribe. Rather, they are an alliance of elite soldiers drawn from many tribes. These are the defenders of Totem Beach and the Great Barrier of Argonnessen. Their recruits are drawn from the dreams of dragonspeaker priests who receive dream-visions ordering particular warriors to Totem Beach to join the guardians. In a few special cases, dragons have personally visited a tribe to call a Seren to the guardians. A Totem Guardian possesses at least six character levels and may possess levels in the Dracolite, Dragonkith, or Dragonrider prestige classes presented in the *Draconomicon*.

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the WotC Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and Shadows of the Last War, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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